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Abraham Lincoln

Memorial Address by
Will H. Thompson

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“Abraham Lincoln”

Memorial Address delivered by Mr. Will H. Thompson before a Joint Session of the Senate and House of Representatives of the Thirteenth Legislature of the State of Washington, held in the House Chamber at Olympia, Wednesday, February the Twelfth, Nineteen Hundred and Thirteen

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ON Friday, February 7th, 1913,
in the Washington State Sen-
ate, Senator George U. Piper,
representing the 34th Senatorial Dis-
trict, King County, offered the following
as Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 10

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. Ten

WHEREAS Wednesday, February 12th, is the anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, and

WHEREAS it is a legal holiday in this state, therefore be it

Resolved by the Senate, the House concurring, that joint memorial exercises be held in the House chamber at two o'clock on Wednesday, February 12th, and that a committee of two from the Senate and three from the House be appointed to make suitable arrangements for such exercises, and be it further

Resolved that the Honorable Will H. Thompson, of Seattle, be invited to make an address upon the occasion.

The President of the Senate called for a rising vote on the resolution and it was adopted unanimously.

On motion of Senator Piper, the rules were suspended and Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 10 was ordered immediately transmitted to the House by William T. Laube, Secretary of the Senate.

On the same day, February 7, 1913, the resolution was taken up under suspension of the rules by the House of Representatives and unanimously adopted.

The Speaker appointed Messrs. Zednick, Black and Truax as a committee on the part of the House of Representatives under Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 10. The resolution was returned to the Senate immediately by C. R. Maybury, Chief Clerk of the House.

Lieutenant Governor Louis F. Hart, President of the Senate, appointed Senators Piper and McCoy as Senate members of the committee, on February 11th, 1913.

Enrolled Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 10 was signed by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House February 11, 1913.

House Chamber, Olympia, Washington

Wednesday, February 12th, 1913.

The joint Legislative Session was called to order by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Howard D. Taylor, at 2:00 o'clock p. m.

Governor Ernest Lister presided over the joint session and introduced Mr. Will H. Thompson, who addressed the assembly as follows:

Governor Lister and members of the General Assembly of Washington, ladies and gentlemen:

"I should be justly chargeable with ingratitude did I fail to thank the members of the Senate and the House of Representatives of the State of Washington for the concurrent resolution that called me here to speak of him who sleeps at Springfield. I have no such vanity, however, as for one moment to think that it was because of any supposed power upon my part to do justice to the subject that I am called upon to devote my time to that induced me to be called. But there were other, broader, better and higher considerations, no doubt. The colossal war, that seems to be inseparable from our thought of Abraham Lincoln, has long since passed away. It has thundered itself into silence; there is scarcely a reverberating echo of it now; the brutal cannon that boomed upon our hills until their iron lungs were hoarse are mute now, and the spider's web is woven across their rusted lips, and in all this great land, from the cold, white lakes of the north to the warm waves of the Mexican gulf, and from the At-

lantic shores of oak to the Pacific shores of fir, we are one great, united, happy, prosperous land. There is no north and no south, no east and no west in our love for our country. There are no jarring voices now. One state is as loyal as any other state. It was considerations, no doubt, like these, rather than any supposed fitness upon my part which induced the Legislative Assembly to invite here to address you upon this occasion a war-scarred and time-battered veteran of the army of Robert E. Lee, to speak a word by way of memorial about him of whom no language is sufficient of expression; and I am here today, because of your kindness and grace, to bear my little, unimportant part in these ceremonies. I thank you for it, indeed I do.

“These memorial meetings are of vast advantage to America.

“Daniel Webster, with stately rhetoric lauding the virtues of Jefferson and Adams, said: ‘It is fit that by public assembly and solemn observance, by anthem and by eulogy we commemorate the services of national benefactors.’

“All people have so felt. The literature of the elder world would, if bereft of its splendid eulogies, be poor indeed. The tributes to great monarchs and heroes graven upon the pyramids and granite monoliths of Egypt, and within the rock-hewn temples of Petra, are among the noblest productions of vanished races. Homer’s Iliad is largely a genius’ colossal applause of the deeds of a demigod. Roman annals contain many noble orations in praise of great

ones gone, but it was more than 1,600 years after the death of the greatest Cæsar before Shakespeare gave to Anthony's tribute its matchless grace. No great man's eulogy should be spoken until a century after his death. Not only because 'the grave buries every error, covers every defect and extinguishes every resentment,' but because distance is necessary for the true contemplation of all greatness. The lofty symmetrical mountain that stands out yonder, the grandest scenic figure in America, is, when viewed from its base, but a mass of shapeless cliffs gashed with caverns and heaped with the ruins of old avalanches. The flower of all knighthood, the one matchless among all of whom history, legend or tradition has had aught to say, had to wait his 2,000 years before Sir Thomas Mallory bent above his sleeping dust to say: 'Ah, Sir Launcelot, there thou liest. Thou wert never matched of earthly knight's hands; and thou wert the courtliest knight that ever bare shield; and thou wert the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrode horse; and thou wert the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman; and thou wert the kindest man that ever stroke with sword; and thou wert the goodliest person that ever came among press of knights; and thou wert the meekest man and the gentlest that ever eat in hall among ladies; and thou wert the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in rest.' The most tremendous plaudit ever yielded to human glory by mortal eloquence was Hugo's characterization of Napoleon:

“He held within his brain the cube of human fac-

ulties. He was equal with the philosophers and sidereal with the astronomers. He made history and he wrote it. His bulletins were Iliads. He could laugh the laugh of a good man by the cradle of his child and then but wave his hand and armies set themselves in march. The flags of an empire rushed together; parks of artillery rolled along; bridges of boats stretched across the rivers; clouds of cavalry galloped in the hurricane. There were cries and trumpets and the trembling of thrones everywhere. The frontiers of the kingdoms oscillated upon the map. Men saw him standing with a flame in his hands and a resplendence in his eyes, unfolding in his two wings the Grand Army and the Old Guard, and he was the archangel of war.'

"By your grace and kindness I am called here to-day to stand with uncovered head and heart and give to you my brain's poor offering to the memory of one of the earth's greatest names. Many years ago at one of those brotherly meetings when first the heroes who wore the blue and those who wore the gray began to fraternize, I was called upon to respond to the sentiment, 'The Noblest Hero of the War.' The stage was hung with great pictures of Lincoln, Grant, Robert E. Lee, Sherman, Sheridan and Stonewall Jackson, and decorated with flags that had seen desperate battle. It was a soldiers' meeting and there was profound surprise when I said: 'When a war assumes such magnitude that two millions of armed men are marshalled upon one side and more than 700,000 upon the other, when heroism is the rule and cowardice the rare exception, it would

seem to be a colossal task to attempt to select the one hero matchless among them all. Yet among so many brave there must have been one bravest of the brave; among so many noble there must have been one noblest of them all. In our wild battle years deeds of valor were 'thicker than leaves in Vallambrossa.' They were not confined to one side, for in that grand roll of honor where glory keeps the memory of her brave there is no North and no South. But who is the one hero and where shall I go to find him? If the most high God could send His angel upon such a quest he would call the lessening roll of all the living who wore the blue or who wore the gray, and the celestial messenger would kneel and softly knock at every tomb and monument and at every unmarked mossy mound or ditch where rests in dreamless sleep the ashes of the brave. He would know the qualities that go to make up the character of such a hero, and he would not pause in his quest until he found the one matchless among them all. He must be brave, for courage is the basis of all honor. He must be kind and tender as a woman, for fierceness and cruelty are nearly akin to moral cowardice. He must be patient, for the long war moaning through the land for weary years would break the courage of the volatile and restless. He must be the incarnation of hope, for the hopeless heart is always wedded to the nerveless hand. Above all he must be utterly unselfish, ready to sacrifice himself for the good of all, giving life and his own good fame, if need be, that dear freedom should not perish from the earth. Many an unmarked mound holds the decaying threads of

blue or gray that wrapped the mouldering bones of a hero, but he is not the one I seek. Brave and self-denying though he was, the private soldier did not carry through the gloomy battle years the burden of anxiety that weighed upon the soul of him who was compelled to order men to go down to death. But if we should ask the Genius of War to read to us the annals of the brave who were illustrious above their fellows how shall we yet find the one incomparable hero? If I should go among the gallant fellows who wore the blue and ask them, I might receive a variety of answers. One might well select the dashing Sheridan as his type, remembering the wild ride from Winchester and the passionate energy that turned rout into triumph. Another might choose Thomas as his ideal hero, recalling that awful 20th of September when for six dreadful hours the long gray waves, crested with steel and fringed with flame, beat in vain upon the Rock of Chickamauga. One would remember with tears the chivalric Reynolds lying dead upon the field of glory on Seminary Heights; and one would see rising before him the dark battle-face of Logan with its stormy eyes. Every hero of the blue might turn inquiringly to the serene, resolute face of Grant, who said, 'I never count my dead,' and whose name has rung in the ears of men as far as the echoes of glory have yet rolled, and wherever the winds of fame have blown.

"And on the other side, the soldier who wore the gray sees rising before him the pale, dead face of many a heroic comrade. What a wealth of heroes he has to choose from. Will he say, 'Give us Stone-

wall Jackson as our hero; give us the silent and mysterious spirit that led us on so many victorious marches down the Shenandoah, with whom we never met defeat and who died in the front of his last grand victory'? Another would remember Gordon, the chevalier of the Southern army; or Clebourne, who in a moment of supreme peril never followed but always led, and whose form was the 'pillar of fire' that his men saw going before them into the gloom of battle. And every one who wore the gray, with bowed head and tear-filled eyes, might whisper the name of Lee. But I have not found my hero yet. Who is he? you ask.

Noblest Hero of the War.

"If I had some new and strange word with power to startle the human heart and rouse all the slumbering energies of the soul, I would say to you, 'Lift up your hearts, lift up your eyes to yon sad and patient face. There is the man, there is the noblest hero of the war! There is the one matchless among the millions! When shall his glory fade? Time passes him with low-bowed head seeing 'eternal honor' graven beneath his name. One by one our precious names are dimmed and blurred by the despoiling years, but his fame grows and will not cease to grow. This nation has a heart, even as a man has. A mighty composite heart, fed and nourished by the warm, red streams that flow into it from heroic hearts from ocean to ocean and from lakes to gulf. In that mighty heart the blood of the North meets and mingles with the blood of the South, and in that vast

heart, deep-set and buttressed against the shocks of time, is reared the monument of Lincoln. Bearing the burdens of all upon his shoulders, weary unto death with his intolerable toil, sick at heart with pity for the dead and dying, he never faltered nor wavered in his duty. No disaster ever shook his courage, no loss ever darkened his immortal hope. Against the background of the darkest storm he saw the rosy arch of the bow of promise. His soul was too large for envy or jealousy or hate. And now, after long years, his fame is safe. It is the steepest path that leads to the highest land; it is the lightning-splintered and the storm-swept peaks that crush through the clouds and break into the still abode of stars.

“It is 104 years ago today since the rough and narrow Kentucky cabin first sheltered the child who was born to be more than king or emperor. That cabin is a shrine now, but then none regarded it. No birth-star burned above it. No Magi journeyed from alien lands to find the child. In pinching poverty and in suffocating ignorance the child passed his young days until at 9 years of age, with labor-roughened hands, he helped to make the coffin to hide the face of her who gave him life. What brewing had this wine of which the world drank freedom? The genii are born, not made. This boy’s life revolved only in the orbit of toil. The coarse-shod feet never knew the shades of academic groves. No flowers ever bloomed beside the rough life path up which, in poverty and toil, he crept toward the light. Through years of earnest effort and careful frugality he had not, at the time he was chosen to fill the

highest office the world holds, amassed as much money as many of our attorneys have received as a single fee!

"It has been nearly a half century since this man died, and yet to some of us it seems but yesterday. Born in the awful dawn of the nineteenth century, when the world was shaking to the tread of the marching armies of Napoleon, when the frontiers of mighty kingdoms 'oscillated upon the map,' he passed away in the last hours of the most terrible war that ever scarred the face of this planet.

"What he did we know. It is not necessary to call the roll of his deeds. A land reunited and cemented with blood and flame; a flag once torn asunder, and now 'one and without a seam,' and upon which no star differs from another star in glory; black swarms of traffic turned to men, the clang of whose falling chains yet reverberates through the world; these are the monuments set to his memory.

"To many the material achievements of a man are the matters of supreme interest when his memory is recalled. To me the first and the controlling thought is 'what was the secret of his greatness?' What characteristic marked him for immortality? What psychic attribute lifted him above his fellows and fixed his fadeless fame in bronze and marble? In Napoleon it was ambition; in Washington it was majesty; in Shakespeare and Michael Angelo it was imagination; in Lincoln it was courage. Courage is the noblest attribute of the human soul. It is the one around which all the other qualities of head and

heart huddle in the hour of tumult. When it fails the man is lost.

“Cowardice is the cause and basis of every crime that blackens the human soul. The Wizard of the Sierras was right when he said:

“‘I hold no sin or curse or vice
So dark as that of cowardice.’

“The thief steals because he has not the courage to fight the battle of life with the brave who toil; the assassin waits in the darkness for his enemy because he has not the courage to meet his adversary face to face on even terms; the slanderer stabs character by inuendo or by anonymous writing because of the terror of his contemptible soul. The editor who is a coward fills his columns with abuse of the citizen who crosses his wish, knowing that his victim has no equal means of retaliation. Men lie because they are afraid to face the righteous results of their acts.

“Courage is the mightiest muniment of character. It is the rock upon which nobility is built. It is the sheet anchor that holds the steadfast soul in every storm that rolls.

“The ancients and the barbaric peoples of the world have fixed the seat of courage in the heart rather than in the brain. Heroic captives have had their hearts torn out and crucified aloft before the eyes of exulting multitudes in order that all might see that the great hearts that had withstood their power so valorously were at last mangled and helpless. So wide-spread and universal has been this belief, even among modern peoples, that it has filled

all written languages with its tropes and metaphors. Tennyson makes Ulysses call upon his sailor comrades for 'one equal purpose of heroic hearts.' Byron cried, upon leaving England forever, 'Here's a heart for any fate.' Shakespeare, in a hundred places, credits the heart for the courage that mocks at death. Oliver Wendell Holmes speaks of the dauntless and indomitable heart that 'breaks and leaves no sign,' and Jean Ingelow says: 'When the heart fails the hope of life is gone.'

"For prodigies of valor, performed on a hundred fields in Europe and Asia, Richard of England has been known to history for 800 years as the Lion Heart. Aristotle and Plato ascribed to the heart this noblest of all virtues, and old Longinus of Palmyra, when the legions of imperial Rome were thundering against the beleaguered walls of the desert city, cried to Queen Zenobia:

"'Woman, gird up now thy heroic heart and lead thine armies against Aurelian.' Zoroaster said: 'The thought of a man is swift and cunning to fashion deeds, and the hand doeth his will, but in the heart lieth the strength that holdeth the warrior in the place of battle.' A thousand such declarations could be gathered from history, literature, legend and tradition. Despite the learned disquisitions of the disciples of Galen, and in the face of our own technical knowledge, we are yet slow to break fealty to the ancient faith, and now, as of old, we greet the struggling hero with 'Courage, brave heart!' and the expression does not seem inapt.

"In the sense in which the seers, philosophers, ora-

tors and poets have applied the theory that the heart of man furnishes the lion-like courage that has made him the world-conquering creature, I apply it to Lincoln when I concede to him the greatest heart that ever beat in this dark world of ours. Bayard Taylor, in his famous 'Song of the Camp,' says: 'The bravest are the tenderest, the loving are the daring.' And who had a tenderer heart than he? The indomitable spirit that answered the critics of the grim Grant with only the two words, 'He fights,' was yet as tender, as sensitive as the gentlest woman's soul.

"He who urged forward 2,000,000 of men into war's delirium nightly visited the hospitals at Washington and laid his great hand upon the fever-flushed faces and sat long by the pitiful beds of the young boys who, at his call, had rushed into the crater at Petersburg or stormed the bloody angle at Spottsylvania. The world has called him a martyr because of the tragic death that came by the assassin's hand, but the four years of crucification through which the brave heart passed is his true patent of martyrdom. The soldier had his perils to face, his long and weary marches to make, his cheerless nights of frost and rain, his scant fare and his heart-sickening isolation from home and wife and child, but these burdens were light compared with the intolerable load under which this giant stooped, but did not stagger, for four terrible years. Jesus of Nazareth spent one night in a dark garden and he sweat, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground; and he begged pitifully that the bitter cup might not be pressed to his

lips! Lincoln passed a thousand nights in Gethsemane! For Christ all was still and serene. No jarring noises filled the holy night. He saw no sight more threatening than the faint light of the sentinel stars; no sound more terrible than the weak winds whispering in the olive trees.

“But when Lincoln went apart to pray the stars were shrouded. The only lights that pierced the gloom were from feeble torches borne by stooping searchers, who looked into the cold faces of dead and mangled men. He heard moans of dying boys and sobs of strong men giving up the ghost. The shrieks of mothers were stabbing like daggers at his heart. His feet splashed in pools of blood and tears. While the pitiful cries of children and the prayers of fathers harrowed his soul and drove his brain to the frontiers of madness, he saw afar the horizon reddened by the flames of burning homes and heard the cannon thunder in the South. Then he arose and, with tears of pity yet heavy in his mournful eyes, he called many thousands more of the young boys from peaceful homes and fed them to the gluttoned jaws of battle.

Hours of Unbearable Agony.

“Once the locked heart broke its bonds and he cried:

“‘I can fight through the days, but, oh, the horror of the nights!’

“A poet has said of these hours of his unbearable agony:

“He was the Southern mother leaning forth
At dead of night to hear the cannon's roar,
Beseeching God to break the cruel North
And turn it, that her son might come once more;
He was New England's maiden, pale and pure,
Whose gallant lover fell on Shiloh's plain;
He was the mangled body of the dead;
He writhing did endure
Wounds and transfigurement and racking pain,
Gangrene and amputation—all things dread.’

“His great soul knew no North, no South. For him there was no East nor any West. The motherland was one and inseverable. He loved no section more than another. While the brutal cannon shook the very walls of the republic he locked his loving arms about the crumbling stones and would not let them fall.

“And even while he wrestled with the demons of wrath and ruin, while his tortured soul was sick and reeling in the path of slaughter, slander and malice were busy with the poisoned dagger; the viper hissed against his name, and the foul jackals of a coward press howled on his trail. But through all he kept a sad face to the South, calling his children from the whole land and urging them to the sacrifice of blood and fire, and sending with each a red badge of courage drained from the exhaustless fountain of his own heart.

Sublime Tragedy of History.

“He gathered all his energies for the last awful year of combat. With tears of infinite pity in his

eyes, but with bolts of battle in his mighty hand, he urged on the legions of Grant and Sherman. The gallant South once more staggered to her feet. Mangled and worn, hopeless, desperate and weak from hunger, she threw her thin lines across his path, and the most sublime tragedy in the annals of history was enacted in the world's sight. The hospitals gave up their sick and wounded to fill the rifted gray ranks. The Southern mother cheered on her soldier son as he staggered into the delirium of his last battle. At every ford a Roland fell; at every bridge Horatius died; in every narrow mountain pass, with pallid face upturned to the cold white flash of stars, lay the mangled body of Leonidas.

"Yet through it all how he was misunderstood! Not only by the Southerner, who looked into the muzzles of his shotted guns, but by millions of those who mocked his devotion and sneered at his immortal hope.

"I well remember how one slight soldier boy, a mere lad, wearing the faded and dust-filled gray, after a dreadful march arose from the ground in the wan light of the morning, and saw, far away to the east, the topmost spires of Washington, and as he watched the dawn whiten down that noble dome his hot foolish heart raged within him as he thought 'yonder under the shadow of that dome sleeps in peace the heartless ruler who gathers and drives on the ever-increasing host of invaders. He, it is, who feeds the withering fire of Grant, and lights the desolating torch of Sherman. He, it is, who turned to ashes the

roof that sheltered my mother's helpless head, and splashed me with my comrade's blood at Spottsylvania,' and in my heart I hated him.

"How little I knew him, I could not know that even while my foolish heart cursed him, he stood with bared head before God, with arms outstretched toward the South, with streaming eyes and pale lips creeping in distress to cover up their cries, whispering 'children, come home.'

"But the slow, wise years have taught us better. We see him now as God then saw him. Then we only caught distorted glimpses of his face through rifts in the clouds of battle; now we see that face illuminated with the splendor of the sunburst of peace and freedom.

"It was one who played about the same father's knee with me; a brave young soldier, through whose gray jacket and gallant breast a Northern bullet crashed, who afterwards visited Lincoln's grave and there wrote these lines:

"I, mindful of a dark and bitter past,
And of its clashing hopes and raging hates,
Still, standing here, invoke a love so vast
It cancels all and all obliterates,
Save love itself, which cannot harbor wrong.
Oh, for a voice of boundless melody,
A voice to fill heaven's hollow to the brim
With one brave burst of song,
Stronger than tempests, nobler than the sea,
That I might give it to a song for him.'

"When has the conquered yielded to the victor such tribute as this? When shall his glory fade? Not

while hearts are true or men remember. His palace is set in the hearts of the people he so loved and they will see that his crown shall not crumble nor ever his throne go down.

“It is well for us today to recall the glory of the great republic, and to solemnly vow allegiance to the great principles upon which its deep foundations were laid. With patient villainy men are nightly plotting its ruin. They are digging beneath its walls now. Ignorant labor is helping them, not knowing to what ruin they burrow. Let us keep vigil with the heart of Lincoln; renew the faith of fighting fathers; shake out the flag and see its gold stars marshal.

“Who can look down the vista of coming years and say what is in store for this brave and restless people? Nations seem to pass through the same mutations as living men. They have their childhood of weakness and simplicity of life; their elasticity and pliant strength of young manhood; their broad and massive power of middle life, and at last their time of senility and death. No old nation has ever renewed its youth. Ours, by grace of Lincoln’s mighty heart, came nearest to such life-renewal. Young as we were in 1860, we were falling from our high estate. The great kings from over sea were wagging their wise heads in joy of our downward march to the tomb of all republics.

“But Lincoln’s heart was sacrificed in the sight of God; heroic millions saw and joined the colossal sacrifice, and the nation recovered such vitality as never thrilled the heart of kingdom or empire. To what

destiny we move we do not know. Time degrades mountains and fills seas; it takes and breaks the little and the great; the pygmies and the Pallantides; the dwarfs and the colossii; but it cannot lay its destroying hand upon truth, and courage dares its path as it dares all things. Republics may fall, kingdoms be upset and empires pass like dreams, but courage like Lincoln's lives on.

"It is too early for an eulogy of Lincoln to be spoken. It may never be spoken. It may be that as the centuries pass the great of earth, those of serene souls and boundless love, may stand by his grave to gather strength and not to eulogize; and these may deem that tender elegiacs are better suited to his memory than stately eloquence, and that tears are better than thunders of applause; and these may stand with lifted hands and streaming eyes, low-speaking in their place, and say, 'Oh, earth, be glad! Hold hard to thy thrilled bosom the greatest heart that ever beat since thy first morn. Oh, prairie winds, breathe low and close and tenderly above him! Oh, sun, be faithful sentinel by day, and thou, oh, moon, by night trail thy pale veil of silver through the hills that he may not lie in darkness and alone! Oh, holy stars, smile on forever, filled with the perfect peace of him who sleeps and dreams no dreams. Oh, land redeemed and disenthralled, come to this Mecca, pilgrim-wise, and learn how great a thing is immeasurable love linked with immortal courage.'"





